

THE MASTER KEY

By John Fleming Wilson

By special arrangement for this page a photo-drama corresponding to the installments of "The Master Key" may now be seen at the leading moving picture theaters. By arrangement made with the Universal Film Manufacturing company it is not only possible to read "The Master Key" in this paper, but also afterward to see moving pictures of our story.

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CHAPTER III. The Runaway Car.

MANY a man writes down on paper the things he cannot articulate. Thomas Gallon, dreaming of two women, taciturn and silent as he was, wrote down the thoughts which he could not express in speech. His diary, well thumbed, held the history of many a lonely night, but of all these nights there was one that stood out in his mind. It was the darkness inclosing a woman on a bed. He still heard her whistled cry. "You speak of God, Tom, but I have no religion but motherhood." Before his closed eyes came the vision of a lamp lit, then almost an apparition—the face of his daughter. One she had died, possibly appalled by the horrors of a world that reeks not of our poor humanity. Yet there was in the dead woman's arms a child, grotesquely asleep, as if unawakened to the sorrows this mother had known.

"Ruth!" he cried. There was no answer from the still woman in the darkness, but thus he had christened his only child.

It seemed to him as if that echo still reverberated from the moon washed hills which marked the site of "The Master Key."

"I am getting old," he thought as he turned the pages of the diary as if unconsciously counting the years since a woman had leaned over his shoulder.

"Ruth!" he murmured again. The problem before him was no longer dim and vague, as it had been in the days of his prime, but absolutely distinct and clear—what was to become of Ruth when he died? With his trained business intelligence he set himself to solve this question.

He reviewed in his mind all the men and women he had known. It was a strange procession. They marched before his sharpened vision, old partners, fresh young girls, mature women, men with check books in their hands, men dying of thirst in the desert—and Wilkerson. He sternly put out of his mind the thought of his former partner—the man—was he dead? If he had not died that night in the gulch, if he were still alive, knowing the secret of "The Master Key," who would save Ruth from this vengeance?

Then there rose before his mind the straight, strong, almost austere figure of his mining engineer, John Dorr—youthful, of course, but he had proved himself wholly competent in almost every task that had been given him.

The old man thought more deeply. He recalled his own former years. He himself had broken down the iron barriers of a cold world for the sake of a woman whose image Ruth was. He had seen in John Dorr's eyes the growing flame of love. Long experience had taught the old man that there is no passion so dependable in this world as love.

John Dorr loved Ruth. It needed no monetary bond to assure his fidelity to her interests, and with the sudden, swift, alert step of a man who had made his final decision he went out on the porch and called, "John, John!"

Within the interior of the little house down the hill the engineer of Thomas Gallon's mine had abandoned his blueprints to study the letters on a little pennant which represented his first victory, a touchdown on the football field within the last ten seconds of play. He knew better than any one that his mission to Valle Vista was futile. Using every resource at his command, he could find no paying ore, and yet—there was the pennant, the emblem of victory hard fought and hard won. Should he give up now? He heard a clear, stern call from up the hill—"John, John!"

"I'll win out yet for Ruth's sake," he said as he answered that imperious cry.

Other ears heard that call, and as John hastened down the hill he saw Ruth's figure by the side of the bungalow, and as if by the opening of a shutter he once more saw the lights of Broadway and a table spread with linen, two people sitting there—his evil genius.

In this complex and highly organized civilization of ours no man can be assured that at any moment some other man possibly thousands of miles distant is not planning an act whose portent would never occur to him.

At a table in a New York restaurant a man and woman were sitting with the words "Gallon," "Dorr" and "Wilkerson" on their lips.

"Harry Wilkerson has found Tom Gallon," she said quietly. "I wonder what will happen?"

Her companion laughed. "Gallon? I had a college mate named 'Dorr,' who was working for a man named 'Gallon' somewhere out in the mines."

The woman's dark eyes lit up, and she seemed more strikingly handsome as she allowed her sudden passion to flood her somber face with color.

"There is money in that mine, George Crane," she said. "But this man Dorr—what sort of chap is he? You mis-

ing stockbrokers usually have information as to all these engineers."

The slender man with the shrewd face smiled opposite her dropped his eyes. "To tell you the truth, Mrs. Darrell, I never liked John Dorr."

"Neither does Harry," she put in quickly.

The stockbroker looked at his plate a moment and then pulled out his memorandum book. "Listen, Jean," he said in a tone she recognized as utterly businesslike. "Shall I buy 'Master Key' stock?"

"There is a girl back there"—she went on intensely.

Crane looked up swiftly. He caught a glint of the jealousy in the woman's eyes. For his own purpose she was most useful, so he snapped the rubber band around his memorandum book, put it back in his pocket and said with finality, "Jean, I'll buy 'Master Key' stock at any price."

Mastering the cry which had come to him from Thomas Gallon's bungalow and realizing that in it was a tone



"Leave it to me."

he had never heard before, John Dorr strode down the hill. As he crossed the gulch he saw the door of the bungalow open, and Ruth appeared.

"I thought I heard your father call," he said awkwardly.

"He was calling you," she answered quietly, "but he went over toward the dump. I think he wants you there."

Ruth laid her little hand on John Dorr's brawny arm. "John," she said, the swift color rising in her cheeks, "I don't want to say anything to make trouble, but father is worried. He trusts you; but, you know, we haven't recovered the lost vein."

John looked her straight in the eye. "Leave it to me."

Her appealing hands crept up his arms, and for one moment she allowed him to read her soul. She made a potent plea, directed by the instinct of a woman who is loved. "John, look after him. He is doing it for me."

Dorr hesitated a moment. It was the first thing Ruth had ever asked him. He felt that he ought to respond to this appeal in some most convincing way, but he could formulate no phrase that would express at once his determination to do everything in his power to help her father and his gratitude that she had taken him into her confidence, so he merely smiled, waved his hand and went down the hill toward the dump beneath the head end of the sprawling trestle.

She called him back. "I forgot it was lunchtime," she said shyly.

"I must get down to your father," he said rather brusquely.

"Then I'll bring you both down your lunches to the mine," she said. "We can have a little picnic all by our selves."

As he went up toward the end of the trestle Dorr observed that the engineers running the donkey engine seemed hardly to know his business.

"My dear fellow," he said quietly "you're allowing too much slack on your cable. It is dangerous. Those ore cars are coming down that trestle too fast. If their brakes give way it means disaster!"

"What's the trouble?" said Gallon coming up with a piece of ore in his hand.

"I was just telling Bill Tubbs that if he did not keep up the slack on his cable on those cars he would whip them over the end of the trestle," said John.

He turned toward the old man and said in a different voice: "You called me. What is it that you want?"

"Look at this, John," said the old man, handing out the piece of ore which, not gold-bearing quartz, he took to talk to you. I've got something to say to you."

Involuntarily John looked down the street. He saw Ruth coming—

numbered her day spent that he would do the best he could for "The Master Key."

"I think we had better go into the mine; we can talk there," he said.

"They are setting off a blast," Gallon remarked.

Dorr looked up at the car roaring past them overhead and said suddenly: "Before anything else you ought to fix that trestle. Some day a car will go over on the dump."

Gallon looked up and then glanced at Dorr. "I guess you're right, John; I've thought of that myself. Things have kind of gone at loose ends. Now I'll see to it myself with your help, because I have something to say to you."

"There comes Ruth with a basket of lunch," said Dorr.

"Oh, yes. When I am away from the house she often pines with me here in the mine. Say, I'm going up on the trestle. Give another talk with Tubbs. He is all right, but he has got careless. Tell him to keep up the slack of his cable. I tell you, John, I have wanted to talk to you for a long time, but first I'm going to look after that cable, because I can see you are right and we might have a bad accident."

As the old man started into the mine, putting one foot after the other with that carelessness characteristic of men becoming decrepit, a man ran out of the mouth of the mine waving his arms. Almost instantly following him came a puff of gray-blue smoke, which soared upward and spread out as if it were the blossom of a cloud warmed into full bloom by the hot sunlight pouring down into the valley.

Ruth let fall the lunch basket and stared upward at that dark, murky hole in the hill. Was John there? Was her father there? She knew that that bulky cloud blooming into the heavens meant death beneath the ground. Unwittingly she cried "John!" Then she remembered her filial duty, and her next word, whispered toward that billowing, eddying mass of vapor was "Father!"

Thus do maidens confess to God the secrets of their heart, but let us see how they conceal from men these same sacred mysteries.

Ruth hastened her pace toward the entrance of the mine. The shute gave way under her little feet, but she struggled upward until she reached the trestle. Having lived all her life in a mining camp, there was no terror for her in anything but falling rock. That effusion of smoke floating over the hillside seemed to speak of disaster. She knew the peril of a premature explosion, and she also knew every working of "The Master Key." And again she wondered whether it was John Dorr or her father, or both who were stifling for air within that dark tunnel.

She did not see John Dorr talking to the engineer below her, nor did she see the miner who had just left the mine and was scrambling down the ladder. Her thought was that during this noon hour, when both shifts were off duty, her father had gone in and accidentally set off a blast. What blasting was done in "The Master Key" usually took place during the noon hour, but owing to carelessness it was sometimes the case that all the blasts were not set off. She had seen men belched out of that dark hole before furious gusts of gas. And yet why was the ore car inside? That, too, spelled disaster.

She dropped the lunch basket and pulled out the pocket electric light which she always carried. It burned only a tiny hole in the billowing smoke. She rushed blindly in, trusting to her long familiarity with the tunnel to find her father.

Thus it was that father and daughter passed each other in the darkness; Gallon grimly but silently cursing the awkwardness of his men, Ruth trying to choke out the names of the two men she loved. Suddenly she came into the free air. The little beam of her lamp



Ruth Hastened Toward the Entrance of the Mine.

showed her nothing but an ore car and the tools dropped by the last shift when they had quit for dinner.

"Father!" she cried, peering into the darkness beyond.

"John!"

She stepped on into the shadow and called again. Her foot slipped on the rough floor of the tunnel, and as she tried to save herself her lamp fell. A moment later she saw a trickle of fire running along toward the heading. It was a fuse leading to a blast that had not yet been shot. With all light gone except that blue flicker, penned in as she was by the ore car, standing there with set brakes, what hope had she? How long would it be before that little gust of flame reached the powder?

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It has been announced here this week that Dr. C. W. Baynham, recently moved here from Little Rock, Ark., plans the establishment of a first class sanitarium and hospital in the city and that plans are now being made to finance the project.

When Dr. Baynham first came to the city he made the statement that he planned the establishment of a hospital in this city at some future

Hundred, of people from this immediate, but did not say just when. At several times during the past two years the county medical association has had the matter up in session, and at one time it looked like a sure go. It is said that Dr. Baynham proposes to carry the project to completion singlehanded, if no co-operation can be secured.

The local physicians are almost agreed to a man that Durant is a logical location for a first class sanitarium in Southeastern Oklahoma.

date community are taken to the hospitals at Dallas, Sherman, and Paris, when they would probably have their cases attended to here at home if a first class hospital were located here.

People from Atoka, as well as from Chaslaw, Johnson, Marshall, and Love counties, would find it a great deal more convenient to come here than to any of the places above named, and it is therefore believed that a sanitarium in this city would be a success.

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